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ABSTRACT

Internationalizing the community college can broaden the educational experience and development of every student in the college. The village intimacy that 25 years ago was possible only in a small town has now expanded to encompass the entire globe, and one of the principal tasks of an educational institution is to prepare students to function productively in this "global village." By welcoming foreign students on campus, the college can introduce students to the many cultural and social differences which exist in the world at their everyday doorsteps and make them aware of their own frame of reference and cultural orientation. Examples are plentiful of how foreign students can touch the lives of faculty, students, and community members who are willing to open their hearts. Unfortunately, it often happens that our exposure to cultural differences is limited to frustrating negative experiences which arise when certain behavior is expected and the foreign student does not behave as expected. The international student too has negative experiences and bears many intellectual, emotional, and cultural assumptions to which instructors and fellow students must be sensitive. The greatest barrier of all is language. To counter the ground-swell of dissatisfaction which may arise from these problems, colleges must be committed to internationalization, clearly identify admissions policies, be flexible, and provide English instruction and social orientation. (AYC)

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# INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION IN A
PLURALISTIC SOCIETY

Would you like to accompany me on an imaginary round-the-world trip? Suppose I have been invited to make a speaking circuit with stops at conferences very similar to this one of trustees of two-year colleges in countries scattered around the world. Since I am sure none of you would pass up such an opportunity, even though the price be to endure an occasional speech of mine now and then, I notice you are all boarding the DC 10 for the first leg of our journey: Western Region ACCT, Albuquerque, New Mexico.

We enter the conference hall and I go to the speaker's platform. The moderator proceeds to introduce me as a distinguished, educator's statesman, associate professor, college administrator, clergyman, chaplain, community organizer, three graduate degrees, Ph.D. (University of Toledo), LTC U.S. Army Reserves, historian, sociologist, missionary to Panama, graduate student at the University of Geneva, Switzerland, and an international student adviser at Owens Technical College. Greeted with a prolonged applause, I step to the podium and look out upon an audience sitting in rapt attention. "With a pedigree like that, the guy's got to be good" races through every mind. In due course, the speech is over, and we speed off to board our DC 10 and our next destination, China, with the thunderous applause from Albuquerque ringing in our ears.

A few hours later we land in Long Wong Province where I am to address a meeting of the Commission members of the Province's collective colleges; but this time, my host introduces me a bit differently. "It is my pleasure to introduce to you Ivan Kurtz, who is the son of Lloyd Kurtz, an elderly

retired Methodist minister in Longford, Kansas. Our guest's father had eight brothers; two were newspaper editors, three ministers, and three who tilled the soil. His grandfather homesteaded on the prairier, one forebearer was a military chaplain to George Washington, and another signed the Declaration of Independence." "Ah, ha. Surely the scion of such a family has accumulated the wisdom of illustrous generations to prepare him to be a wise counselor and leader worthy to be heard" is a thought that goes racing through the audience. And so, again, my hearers listen in rapt attention, not knowing everything about this parapetetic American; for I have lead what they would consider an unsettled and unstable life. Why, I have switched from one occupation to another; I have moved from here to there; and I never put down my roots next to my father's house where I could thoroughly learn the lessons of my forebearers.

We must make a hurried retreat out of the assembly hall as heads bob up and down from the bows given in gratitude to my profound speech, because we barely have time to reach our next engagement in New Delhi, India. Here the Ministry of Education has called a conference of the headmasters of India's village colleges to learn how in America we organize for education.

If I am to be as successful in India as I was in China and Albuquerque, I should have my host introduce me <u>without</u> mentioning anything of my background or that I am Assistant President of a technical college. Rather, with apologies I shall begin my remarks by assuring my audience of my humbleness in presenting my terribly parochial thoughts before a group of such distinguished educators. There is really nothing, I tell them, in my background to give me or them cause to believe that I can impart even a thimble of new wisdom to them. After all, I have never written a book, not even so much as a published article. My ideas have not been aired in

public debate with my peers and, what is more, the press of everyday administrative maintenance has left little time for me to give much depth in planning strategy or philosophy.

But then, as I launch into my definitive treatise on institutional organization, the audience becomes so quiet. They are spellbound that such an unknown can command so much wisdom. You can almost hear a pin drop; that is, until the deafening, thunderous applause at my dramatic, closing statement. The audience is pleased beyond words to describe. Why? Because this audience has been delightfully surprised that from such a nobody they have been touched by wisdom. For in their Buddhist philosophy, one virtue sought after is to experience the pleasure of unexpected joy. I, again, was a resounding success!

We really haven't time to take our imaginary trip all the rest of the way around the world. But, if we did, we should find that for me to be successful on the lecture circuit, every culture would demand that I make some accommodation with its own mores, uniqueness, and peculiarity as we have seen demonstrated in such a simple act as being introduced as a speaker. I have invited you to go with me on our world tour to make this simple point: Internationalizing the community college can broaden the educational experience and development of every student in our colleges, because we share in a society and world that is a mosaic of many cultural and social milieus.

I am convinced that if we would serve our students with the most effective education, we must prepare them to live in a world that is at our everyday doorstep, to live in a kind of world that Marshall McLuhan has called our "global village." Possibly your experience was similar to mine, growing up in a small village where I knew every member of every family in

my village. It was an environment of what sociologists call primary relationships. If someone became ill, everyone knew. When two people, talking on the phone, discovered neither had heard what had happened to a neighbor's son who moved to Seattle, they would suddenly discover they were joined by a third party on the line who knew what happened to him. Yes, it was Minnie, the central operator, who freely shared the latest news. Minnie was like a talking newspaper.

Today, only 25 years later, we have seen that village intimacy expand to encompass an entire globe. Every evening in living color, before our very eyes, in our own living rooms, we catch up on the latest world's gossip, not by Minnie, but by Rather or Chancellor or Donaldson. One of the principle tasks our educational institutions must do in the 1980s and 90s is to prepare our students to live and function productively in this "global village." I am here to propose to you that the contribution foreign students can bring to a campus is to force a faculty and staff, yes even a whole community, to deal with the frame of reference of their own cultural orientation. Don't think for a minute that international students can come on your campus and it is "business as usual." In both subtle and unnerving situations, <u>everyone</u> is touched, however so slightly. But growing out of the agony are a people better prepared to live in a pluralistic and variegated social world.

I well remember a Christmas three years ago when we had a group of 20 Nigerian students attending our College through the Nigerian Manpower Project. I had found a well-to-do lawyer's family to host a live-in Nigerian student, Ferdinand Nodolo. He was quickly adopted into the circle of that family and the hearts of the citizens of the whole town. At Christmas, the family asked Ferdinand if he would like to invite some

friends over. "Why yes," he said, "my Nigerian friends, in fact." This generous family said that would be fine, that they would simply leave for the day and turn the entire house over to him. When they asked him what he would like to do to feed the group, he pointed to the pet goat in the backyard. When they asked if he needed anything else, he replied, "yes, I'll need another goat." And, lo and behold, if a day later there weren't two goats in the backyard!"

My task was to gather up 19 Nigerians from all over town in the College bus and take them out to Ferdinand's. And, of course, each of them had a friend or two, so there ended up being quite a delegation to transport to this rather white-oriented suburban community. Need I tell you what a spectacle it was for the folks living in that little town to see 40 or so blacks standing in snow up to their knees butchering and barbequing two goats in their neighbor's backyard? Needless to say, the group had a <u>great</u> time!

About 2 a.m. the next morning I took the group back to Toledo, with each Nigerian carrying packages of cooked and uncooked goat meat. I then drove the bus back to the College and parked it in a heated building, got in my car and went home. Then an interesting situation developed. A couple of days later our coach and basketball team proceeded to board the same bus to go to a tournament. Someone says, "What in the world smells in here?" And they all began to realize they were almost to be overcome by the stench of a rotten odor. Upon searching through the bus they finally found the cause. There under one of the seats, they found - can you guess? - yes, the tongue of a goat! Rest assured those boys from the Midwest had an unforgettable introduction to the "global village" that Christmas season.

So often it happens that our exposure to cultural differences and uniquenesses grow out of frustrating, negative experiences. Imagine, for instance, the reaction of students and other spectators at Rutgers University when a visiting Peoples Republic of China basketball team played Rutgers. At the final buzzer, the game was a dead even tie. The Rutgers team trooped over to their coach to plan overtime strategy, but they and the thousands watching couldn't believe their eyes when the Chinese proceeded to walk of the court to return to their dressing room. "Hey, what's this? Where are you going? Interpreter, oh interpreter, come here - what's going on? Hurry, tell them the game's not over. We've gotta play off this tie. We gotta find out who's the best, who's gonna win!" The Chinese coach is summoned back to the gym. "What's the matter with you?" we demand. "Can't you see the game's not over? Now you bring your team back on the court, and we're gonna finish this game!" "But," he protests, "the game is over. We played a regulation four quarters. The fact the game ended in a tie shows it is a 'friendly' tie. Our teams are an even match." Several thousand upset spectators went to their homes that night chastening those "stupid Chinks" who refused to play to win. "See, what did I tell you? You can't trust a communist! And besides, if there is going to be no winner, why have a scoreboard in the first place?"

Unfortunately, it often happens on the College campus that misunderstandings and frustrations grow out of situations where certain behavior is expected by everyone - faculty, administrators, custodians, and other students. But for a host of reasons (many of them cultural) the international student doesn't behave as everyone else.

Let's take a closer look. Suppose you owe a bill. You had wanted something very badly, but you couldn't pay cash. So you went into debt

with a 30-day credit. You are sure you can pay the bill in 30 days. And the proprietor agrees to give you a 30-day extension. But on the 29th day your employer goes bankrupt, checks bounce, and now you are told you will not get paid for another 30 days. What do you do about the note that is due tomorrow? Most of you would do what I know I would do - I'd hot-foot it down to my creditor and ask for a 30-day extension. He will understand. After all, he knows you can't get blood out of turnips. Better give a second chance and save the cost of a collection agency, he concludes.

But in many cases, the international student runs a different program, a different set of values. If the controller of your College advances tuition to international students (which we have found to be a necessity in many legitimate cases) there is a high probability that some of those students will <u>not</u> be able to pay in 30 days. If money transfers from home aren't the problem, then stereo and Transam payments are. But be assured - some of the international students will <u>not</u> come in to talk to the Controller about the problem. In fact, they may take long detours to bypass his office. Suddenly, you find yourself in the midst of a complicated problem involving nonpayment, expulsion, immigration, and national credibility. Controllers and fiscal officers have their limits of latitude and patience, as we all do, and for them such simple misunderstandings as nonpayment are not to be excused, overlooked, or ignored.

Remember also that this international student who suddenly poses excruciating problems on everyone, often right up to the President himself, is going through a cultural shock. If he is a Saudi whose first class on campus was an English course with a woman instructor, I can tell you, he has confronted an unbelievable crisis of identity and must adjust to learning from a woman for the first time in his life. He is understandably

confused about many things - timely payments, for one thing - and faced with the range of adaptations that everyone of us would find difficult to handle if we were in his place.

There are so many unquestioned assumptions in the intellectual, emotional and cultural baggage the international student brings with him or her and some people, who are not sensitive to the global village, will say and do things to the student which pile crisis upon crisis for him or her. Let me give a couple of examples. A Nigerian writes a paper for the English instructor. It is returned with corrected spelling: theater, not theatre. But his British teacher back home had marked him down because he spelled it theater! I heard of a student from a certain country in Africa who wrote a theme paper for English. The assignment was to write a paper on wildlife in Northwest Ohio. The student wrote on alligators in the Maumee River. Now, the Maumee runs through Toledo into Lake Erie; and since you can see it frozen over all winter, anyone should know there aren't alligators in the Maumee. "So here - rewrite your paper and this time do the assignment right!" But the student is left in a state of shock. Why, there isn't a river in his whole country that doesn't harbor alligators. How is this Maumee any different? Don't all rivers have alligators.

The greatest challenge, of course, for most of the international students is the language barrier. I call it a barrier because it is, indeed, a horrendous problem. The international student may not be able to follow the instructor, who is talking at too fast a clip. The student raises his hand, is recognized and attempts to communicate those parts of the comments he failed to hear. Have you ever tried to ask someone to repeat a portion of a conversation you didn't hear? Very difficult, isn't

it? Add the burden of mental translation in communicating, and it is no wonder the instructor and other students get so impatient.

These are only some of the reasons it isn't difficult to find a ground-swell of dissatisfaction over the presence of international students on a college campus. Nevertheless, if we desire to educate our students to live in the global village and to function in a pluralistic society, it is obvious to me that the presence of international students can enhance our efforts to graduate mature citizens who are capable of coping effectively in a complex, interrelated and interdependent world.

I would propose five major concerns for an institution to consider in establishing an arena of positive relationships to enhance the educational scene that involves international students.

First, is commitment to internationalizing the campus. This commitment must be resident in the Board of Trustees, the President, and a significant cross-section of the college community. Second, admissions policies for internationals must be thoroughly debated and clearly identified. Will transfers be accepted? What testing device will be used and cutoff score required for admission? Third, what arrangements will be made for English as a Second Language instruction to augment needed language skills? Fourth, will the college require the same courses for graduation that are required for national students? Is there a reason to require a successful completion of an American government course by a student from Botswana? Finally, a fifth area of concern is the social orientation provided for the international student. What shall be provided, in addition to our college orientation course of one credit, to assist the international student to understand how to live in a very

pluralistic and unstructured society rather than the monolithic and structured society back home? Will we assist the student in finding decent housing, transportation, banking services, used clothing stores, host families?

These areas of concern are not exhaustive, but they are a start in planning for a population of students whose very presence can benefit us, our students and, in a small but important way, the whole global village.

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